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ABSTRACT

As personality and social psychology research has shown, cross-situational consistency of people's social behavior tends to be rather low. This applies also to teachers' classroom behavior: teachers adapt to situative conditions. However, both situation specificity and teachers' adaptation are not sufficiently taken into account in research and in the analysis of the interdependence of theory--which almost by definition is situation invariant--and practice. An adaptation function must be assumed which "translates" the theory into unique actions which are appropriate for the unique situation. A theory of cross- situational consistency could help to analyze this adaptation function. The framework of a theory of intraindividual (cross-situational) differences based on cognitive social learning theory is presented that could satisfy this need. This theory links the means (i.e., teacher activities) and the goals the subject pursues. It is shown that situation specific behavior is usually related to inverted-U-shaped behavior-outcome relationships, which can be analyzed in terms of power in opposed directions. A research program based on this approach is presented which is designed to improve the applicability of theory (or research) in practice by explicitly taking into account the fundamental differences between theory and practice with respect to the situation specificity problem. (Author)

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TEACHING IS SITUATION SPECIFIC BUT THEORY IS NOT TOWARD A HIGHER IMPACT OF RESEARCH ON PRACTICE

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Abstract

As personality and social psychology research has shown, cross-situational consistency of people's social behavior tends to be rather low. This applies also to teachers' classroom behavior: Teachers adapt to situative conditions. However, both situation specificity and teachers' adaptation are not sufficiently taken into account in research and in the analysis of the interdependence of theory - which almost by definition is situation invariant - and practice. An *adaptation function* must be assumed which "translates" the theory into unique actions which are appropriate for the the unique situation. A theory of cross-situational consistency could help to analyze this adaptation function.

The framework of a theory of intraindividual (cross-situational) differences based on cognitive social learning theory is presented that could satisfy this need. This theory links the means (i.e., teacher activities) and the goals the subject pursues. It is shown that situation specific behavior is usually related to inverted-U-shaped behavior-outcome relationships, which can be analyzed in terms of powers in opposed directions. A research program based on this approach is presented which is designed to improve the applicability of theory (or research) in practice by explicitely taking into account the fundamental differences between theory and practice with respect to the situation specificity problem.

Teaching is situation specific but theory is not

Toward a higher impact of research on practice

In her[2] daily practice, a teacher has to deal with many different situations. She must work with individual students, who are very different, she must work with the whole class, and these activities may be very different, depending on whether she tries to introduce a new topic, organizes an excercise or checks whether the students know what they are supposed to. In her work with individual students, she must take into account the individual personality of each student, as well as his specific behavior in a given interaction. For these reasons, teachers pretend to act situation specificly, and indeed, they do behave differently in different situations (cf., e.g., Soar & Soar, 1983; Stodolsky, 1984). According to Hunt (1976), teachers' adaptation to students is the heart of the teaching-learning process; a conservative estimate would suggest 100 occurrences of adaptation per hour. However, this phenomenon of teachers' adaptation is poorly understood. In the 1989 AERA Annual meeting, this adaptation process was alluded to in a few papers (e.g., Roehler & Reinken, 1989; Yinger, 1989) which raised more questions about its functioning than giving answers. This is quite representative of the state of the art in this field.

Further, teachers cannot capitalize on current research results for their adaptive behavior. Of course, there are many theories or rules which tell teachers what to do (e.g., Gage & Berliner, 1979; Lindgren, 1980; Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987; etc.) and what works (Fraser, Walberg, Welch & Hattie, 1987; US Department of Education, 1987; etc.). But very few of these theories take into account the situations and differenciate the appropriate behavior according to the specific conditions of the interaction; i.e., most of these theories are not situation specific. And indeed, it is a characteristic of theory to be general or generalizable across time as well as across situations. A theory that would apply only to one single situation would not be particularly helpful since this specific situation is likely to be unique and will not occur again in exactly the same form.

Thus, we have a dilemma: On one hand, teachers are supposed both to act situation specifically and to use scientific knowledge when deciding how to act. On the other hand, the theories on which they should base their behavior are general and contain no statements on how to behave in particular situations. This dilemma may be one of the reasons of the little impact of educational research on education (cf. Patry, 1988a), and thus further analysis might well provide help on how to increase this impact.

In the following, I want to analyze some of the main issues of this dilemma and put forward a tentative solution. To do so, I want to capitalize on the research on cross-situational consistency, on one hand, and on the discussion of the relationship between theory and practice, on the other.

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2 For sake of simplicity, in the present text, the teacher will be female (since in our country most elementary teachers are women) and the student male, but of course the text applies also to male teachers and female students, and I do not differenciate between teachers on different levels and branches.

1. A model of the relationship between theory and practice

This can be done based on a very general model of the relation between theory and practice, as seen by the teacher (fig. 1). According to this model, there are several crucial requirements for the practical application of scientific knowledge; the following ones deal with the question of adaptation or cross-situational consistency:

1. Application of theory can be facilitated when the theory includes situative aspects; a theory of cross-situational consistency (or inconsistency) could be a part of the scientific theory to be applied. The teacher then not only has a general, yet not very precise rule how to behave in almost any situation, but she has also some means to see whether and how the rule applies in the class of situations to which the particular situation belongs; such a theory can remain general (valid for many situations) but contains elements or procedures which allow a very close fit to the individual situation. As will be seen in the point 3, this requirement is not absolutely necessary, but its fulfillment can help the teacher very much.
2. Scientific knowledge's impact on teaching practice is through the teachers' subjective theory: It is "translated" though teacher training by the means of instruction ("tell"), demonstration ("show") and tentative actions ("do") or through reading of scientific literature, etc.. Of course, the teacher learns from her experience, too, and this is probably the most important influence on her subjective theory. Hopefully, the teacher's actions and their consequences will also be used in educational research to increase scientific knowledge. Although training as well as the teacher's and the scientist's capitalizing on practical experience are not always optimally done, they are at least possible and do not represent obstacles which would be impossible to pass.
3. There must be a function that combines the scientific knowledge with situation related elements of the subjective theories to compensate for the situation independence of the scientific theories. This function links the theory to classes of situations. Indeed, the teacher knows quite well what situations she is in: This knowledge is part of her subjective theory. Thus, the teacher interpretes the scientific theory based on her own subjective theory. This procedure again is not particularly problematic, although the scientific theory usually gives little help except for demonstrating exemplary applications in the training process. It would be useful, however, if the theory would contain situationally bound information, as mentioned in the first point.
4. But this is not sufficient to fit the unique needs of the particular situation. The statements from theory must be applied in the particular situation. Obviously, the teacher is supposed to do the adaptation work mentioned above. This means: When confronted with a particular situation, the teacher must capitalize on her subjective theory - be it scientifically correct and approved or not -, but also fit her behavior to the individual needs of the particular situation. She must take into account that little Joe seems to have had a fight during the break, that little Jim has done a good work just before, and that she wants little John to get some particularly difficult work done without the class becoming noisy. No theory can tell her exactly how to fit the individual needs of the single student and achieve her own teaching goals at the same time; rather, she must interprete the theory and attempt her own operationalization which seems to her to be best adapted.

The fourth requirement is most difficult to satisfy and is probably the most important reason for the claim of teachers that they cannot use scientific theory: It is simply to general to fit every situation. What the teacher do not recognize is that they have to do the application work themselves, i.e., become creative and somehow "invent" the ideal translation of theory into practice. The questions are, then, first whether the scientific statements could not be stated in such a way that they could be adapted to the particular situation more easily, and second, what

help can be given to the teacher to do this adaptation work.

2. Cross-situational consistency

Situation specificity has rarely been discussed in educational research. However, it has been an important topic in personality and social research until the forties (e.g., Allport & Vernon, 1933; Dudycha, 1936; Hartshorne & May, 1928; Newcomb, 1929; OSS Assessment Staff, 1948; Sakoda, 1952; Vernon & Parry, 1949; cf. also Bellows, 1963) and then again in the late sixties and seventies after the publication of several reviews on the research in personality (Heiss, 1949; Hunt, 1965; Mischel, 1968; Peterson, 1968; Thomae, 1968; Vernon, 1964), based, among others, on new research evidence (e.g., Endler, Hunt & Rosenstein, 1962; Passini & Norman, 1966). As it seems, one can only expect cross-situational consistency for some of the behaviors in some of the situations for some of the people some of the time (cf. the title of Bem & Allen, 1974, which has been retaken and adapted in several subsequent papers).

One of these reviews, Walter Mischel's "Personality and Assessment" (1968), was particularly important in triggering a new debate on situation specificity - or rather on its opposite, cross-situational consistency. Mischel showed that in social behavior (and particularly when assessed with systematic observation, cf. Peake, 1982), the correlations between behaviors in different situations rarely exceed .30, while in cognitive psychology, the consistency is usually much higher. This result did not remain unchallenged, and there were several attempts to "solve the consistency problem", i.e., to develop methods which would yield higher correlations (cf., e.g., Bem & Allen, 1974; Buss & Craik, 1983; Epstein, 1980; Magnusson & Endler, 1977; Snyder & Ickes, 1984; and many more; cf. also Kenrick & Funder, 1988; West, 1983; etc.).

As Mischel and Peake (1983) have indicated, in most of these attempts, situational effects were considered as "error". Such an interpretation might be appropriate for some goals but not for others:

> "Depending on one's purpose, the whithin-person variance - the interactional effects of persons with the conditions of their lives - may be as much part of the 'true' fabric of human behavior, to be understood and analyzed, as is the abstracted categorization of a person's average performance in relation to a comparison group on the summary score of a more or less arbitrarily created test battery" (Mischel & Peake, 1983, S. 395).

Intra-individual variability has rarely been analyzed. There are a few theoretical conceptions in which it is central, but this approaches have remained rather periferal in the scientific discussion. And more importantly, few of them have led to applicable theories, i.e. theories which take into account situative aspects or which explicitely use situations within their frameworks. It is interesting that one of the most important approaches which take situations into account (at least to some degree) - Applied Behavior Analysis and behavior modification (e.g., Bandura, 1969; Mischel, 1968, chapter 7) - can be applied rather easely in practical situations.

Teachers' adapation to the individual needs of the students is a question of intra-individual variability in the teacher's behaviors. Its analysis based on the consistency debate can help to better understand the adaptation process, and in particular, how teachers can use the theories that are available from research. It is important, however, to keep in mind that cross-situational consistency seems to be a problem in *social*, not in cognitive behavior. It is interesting to see that research on teaching has mainly focussed on how to transfer knowledge, while the teachers' manifest needs for information are rather in the interpersonal domain (this is the main reason of failures of teachers) - and these needs cannot be satisfied by the research with respect to adaptation.

Research on cross-situational consistency can help in several ways to increase the impact of theory on practice:

- One can state the scientific theories in such a way that they can be adapted to the particular situation more easily. This means that a theory of cross-situational inconsistency which would account for situation specificity is developed. If this theory is compatible with another theory of interest about social behavior, both theories can be combined, thus rendering the second theory situation specific.
- One can analyze and theoretically conceptualize the translation process (requirement 4 in chapter 1). If more is known about this process, one can tell the teachers how to go about doing it.

For both means, a theory of intra-individual variability or cross-situational inconsistency is necessary. Unfortunately, the discussion in the consistency debate so far has not yielded such a theory. The approach wich comes closest to being a theory, person-situation-interactionism (Magnusson & Endler, 1977), cannot be considered to be a theory which satisfies the needs yet (cf. Endler, 1983).

3.Toward a theory of intra-individual variability

My own approach is based on Mischel's (1968, 1973, 1977, 1984) cognitive social learning theory. In this paper I can just present some features of this theory of intraindividual (cross-situational) differences, and I cannot go into the details (for details cf. Patry, 1987). This theory has been formulated as a set of hypotheses, which were tested and confirmed using the following sets of data from different domains:

- the literature on the generalizability of intelligence testing and related measures, as compared with the literature on the generalizability in the social behavior domain (e.g., Follman, 1984);
- the distinction between typical and maximal performance (Cronbach, 1970; cf. also Fiske & Butler, 1963, and Wallace, 1966. among others), which corresponds to the distinction between cognitive and social behavior (cf. also below);
- the empirical analyses of the hypotheses derived from the typical/maximal distinction (Turner & Gilliland, 1979; Klesges & McGinley, 1982; etc.);
- the research on the behavior of subjects in role-playing situations as compared with their behavior in natural or naturalistic research (ecological validity or generalizability of role-playing situations, cf., e.g., McNamara & Blumer, 1982);
- behavior-outcome analyses for assertion, i.e., the judgment of the values of the consequences of nonassertive, assertive , and aggressive behavior in different situations (e.g., N. Epstein, 1980; St. Lawrence et al., 1985; Wohlfolg & Dever, 1979);
- research on the ecological validity of observational studies (e.g., Baum, Forehand & Zegiob, 1979; Christensen & Hazzard, 1983; Haynes & Horn, 1982);
- research using the multitrait-multimethod approach (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; cf. Fiske, 1982; Turner, 1981);
- studies on the effects of inconsistent educational practices (e.g., nattering, Patterson, 1982);
- studies on the goals of parents and teachers (e.g., Hofer, 1984; Krampen, 1984);
- some studies on situation specific behaviors of parents in educational situations (there is very little research in this domain);
- studies on the judgment of the "typical", the "ideal" and the "bad" teacher (Klaghofer, Oser & Patry, 1987);

- etc.

All these data sets are products of research independent of the disussion on cross-situational consistency, but all of the are strongly related to consistency and to some of the hypotheses of the theory. And none of these data sets are in contradiction to the hypotheses. Thus, one can say that the hypotheses have passed several strong tests in various domains without being refuted.

The main hypothesis says that in the social domain, similar behaviors may have different consequences in different situations, thus it is appropriate to behave differently even to reach similar goals. Let us analyse this hypothesis more in detail. A central principle of practice is that one attempts to reach goals in idiosyncratic situations. Thus, instead of looking only at the behavior of subjects, as is typically done, we are dealing with **actions**, i.e., with intentional, goal-directed behaviors (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Goals of people - and in particular of teachers - consist of two aspects:

- the (potential) outcomes of behavior, and
- the values attributed to these outcomes (Mischel, 1973).

Let us first look at the relationship between behavior and outcome. For this purpose we take a parameter of the behavior which can be quantified. E.g., we can take the frequency, duration or intensity according to a behavior observation system. We can then ask what the consequences are when there is **more** of the behavior (the behavior is more frequent, lasts longer, or is more intense, etc.) and what the consequences are in the case of **less** behavior. These consequences, then, can be valued and set into relation to what the teacher wants to achieve: to her goals. As an example, we can take the outcome "amount of learning by the student", which is certainly a central goal of all teachers; as behavior parameter, we take simply how long the teacher speaks as compared to the student (this could be done, e.g., by using Flanders', 1960, observation system): What is the percentage of teacher's speaking?

Now when we think about the relationship between the teacher's speech duration and the students' learning, we come to the following conclusion:

- Complete silence of the teacher is certainly inappropriate: She must participate at the classroom interaction;
- If she speaks 100 % of the time, the students won't learn a lot either.
- The optimal behavior will be somewhere in between (fig. 2), or, as Soar and Soar (1983, p. 74) have put it with respect to the impact of control of learning task on achievement outcomes: "More is not necessarily better".

However, most people will reply that the optimum is not always the same! Sometimes, it is better for a teacher to keep pretty quite, while at other occasions, she should be rather verbally active. And this is where situation specificity is at stake: **The appropriate amount of speech depends on the situation**.

As a general rule, one can say that whenever the relationship between the behavior and valued outcomes - i.e. goals - has an inverted-U-shape, as in the present example, it is very likely that the behavior is situation specific. I have analyzed this principle with a lot of behaviors and in many different contexts, and always behaviors with inverted-U-shaped behavior-outcome relationships were situation specific (Patry, 1987, 1988b). As one can show, this relationship corresponds exactly to what Cronbach (1970, p. 38) has called "typical behavior" which he describes to be situation specific.

Another type of behavior-outcome relationship can be described as "the more, the better" (cf. fig. 3). Let us again take an example: performance in a test. The more items I answer correctly in a school test or intelligence test, etc., the more satisfied I am. This corresponds to the "maximum performance" that Cronbach (1970, p. 35) describes and which refers to "how well a person can perform at his best". As can be shown, behavior-outcome relationships of the maximum type yield behavior that is consistent across situations.

The difference between the two types of behavior-outcome relationships with respect to situation specificity requires an explanation: Why is it that in typical performance, which includes all social behavior, the behavior-outcome relationship is inverted-U-shaped? We have strong reasons to believe that there are at least two relationships of the maximum performance type, however in opposed direction. Thus, with respect to one feature, the more is the better, while with respect to another feature, the less is the better. So in the speech duration example above (fig. 2), one can say that, on one hand, the less the teacher speaks, the more the student can be active, and it is indeed this activity that is best for the students's learning (line a in fig. 4: the less, the better). On the other hand, the students need information, they want to know what to do, or at least have some indication in that regard, they cannot be left alone. With respect to this feature, one can say that the more the teacher speaks, the better (line b in fig. 4). If we combine these two lines, e.g., by multiplication, we get an inverted U-shaped curve, as shown in fig. 4.

One can then assume that dependent upon the situation, the strength of an outcome value or the slope of the behavior-outcome relationships of the maximum performance type are different. If the teachers behave optimally, then, they behave situation specifically.[3]

Of course, so far, the analysis has been very simple. One should analyse also qualitative aspects of the speech of the teacher, not only the simple duration, and there are many more features that should be taken into account. I have left them out for sake of simplicity, but if the theory is to be helpful for the teacher, they must be taken into account.

However, it must also be said that very little is known in that respect. Teaching has not been analyzed in terms as used above, and cross-situational inconsistency has not been a topic of educational research at all. So if theory should become more influential to education through a theory of the type described above, much additional research is requested to analyze the different powers or behavior-outcome-relationships involved in some particular type of behavior.

4. What does this help the teacher

How can such a theory, which could be described only very briefly here, be helpful to the teacher? Let us assume that we have a theory which states which maximum performance behavior-outcome relationships interact

3 Of course, there are several additional features requested so that the subject can act optimally: She must know the behavior-outcome relationship, she must not be influenced by other features (e.g., emotions, incompatible goals, etc.), she must be able to show the behavior, etc.

in what way to yield an inverted-U-shaped relationship - it would be the task of research to provide us with such a theory.

If the teachers know this theory, then, and know what aspects are included in a specific behavior, they can estimate what consequence "a little bit more" of the behavior or "a little bit less" of it might have, and they can estimate which of both is closer to their goals. Thus, in some way, the adaptation function that we have claimed above is hidden in this theory.

But one has to be clear that this is only a first step, and that our goal, a more applicable theory, still is far away. On the other hand, and this seems to me to be important, what I have presented here might well be a way to attenuate the problem of application of theory in practice. There is much to be done, but most of it can be done. And if it is done, theory can have more impact on practice.

The approach, thus, results in a research program which should be both theoretical and empirical. We are currently gathering data to test some hypotheses within this approach, especially concerning the amount of directivity in teachers. Research of this kind should help to improve the applicability of theory (or research) in practice. I am not here claiming that this way, the gap between theory and practice can be completely bridged: This will never be the case. Rather, the aim is to reduce the distance, to increase the impact of theory on practice. The analysis of intra-individual variability, of cross-situational inconsistencies, seems to be a step in a right direction since it explicitely takes into account one of the fundamental differences between theory and practice: the fact, that practice is situation specific, but theory is not.

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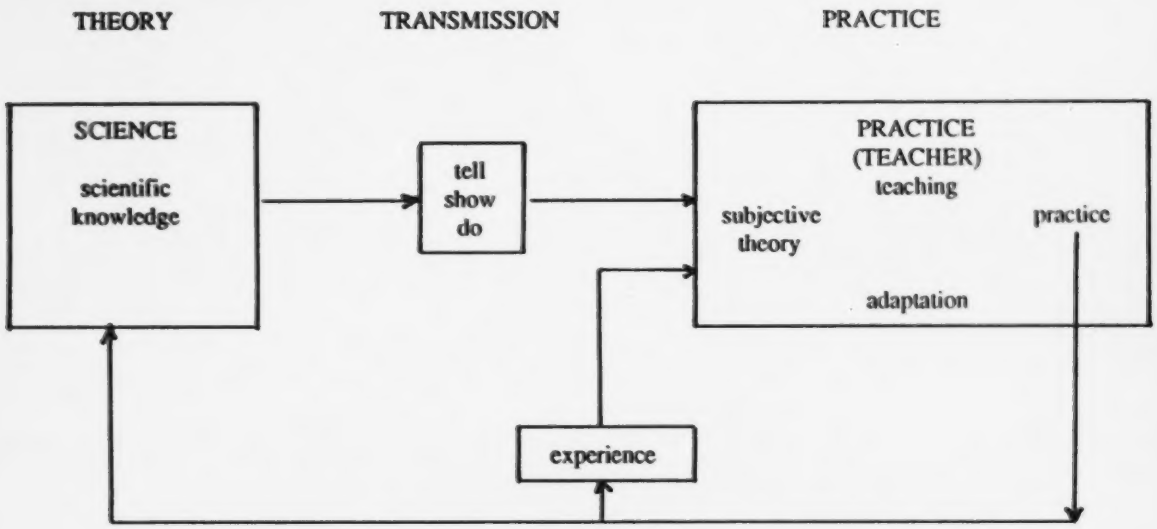

Fig. 1: A simplifying model of the relationship between theory and practice

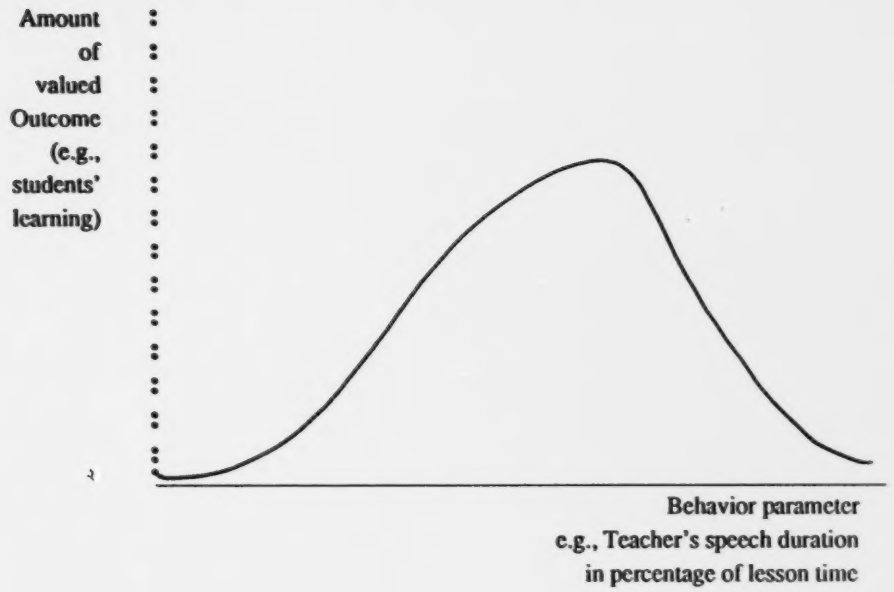

Fig. 2: Inverted-U-shaped behavior-outcome relationship

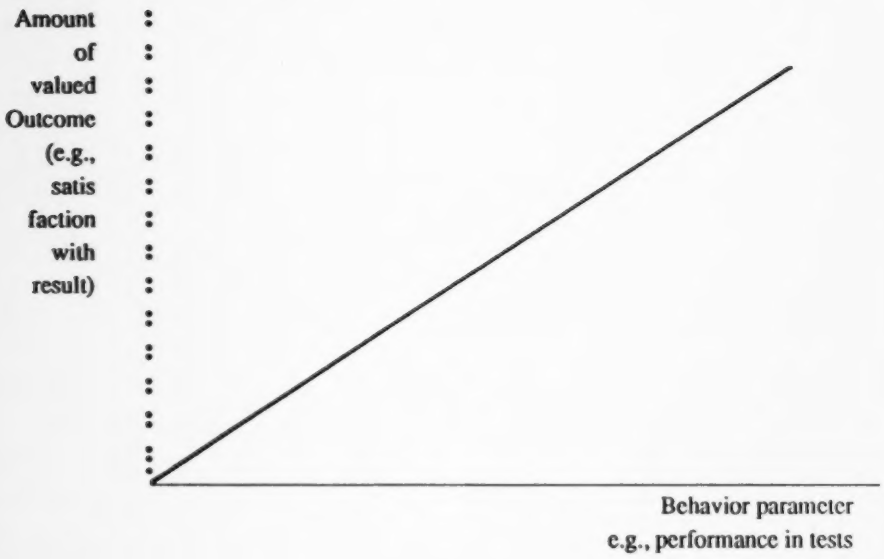

Fig. 3: Behavior-outcome relationship of the "the more, the better"-type

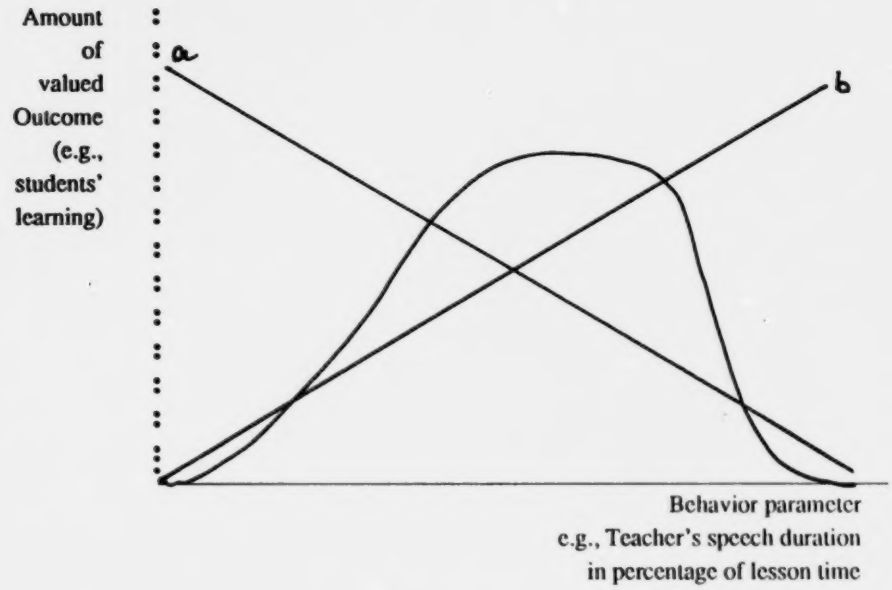

Fig. 4: Inverted-U-shaped behavior-outcome relationship